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Kill Switch



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Chapter 1 by Elisabeth Ford

Conrad was the first to go, split in two, the halves of his body peeling neatly apart. The weapon must have thrown itself through him at incredible speed, stretched out like razor wire: quick, but far from clean.

It should have been obvious then that it was only warming up, toying with us even. The machine could have killed us all that instant but instead it chose to give this little demonstration - it wanted us to run, to try and evade it, to fight for our lives. More than anything, it wanted to hunt. This was good, theoretically, it meant that it was doing its job and now all we had to do was ours: stay down, stay ahead of it, and try to stay alive.

I throw myself to the ground, rolling for cover and then back to my feet, running low, trying to present as small a target as possible. Two more of my men fall in front of me, one seems to have been shot through the eye, the back of his head exploding like an orange halo as he falls. That was Josh Sassenick; he was 23 and shouldn't really have been here but the son of a bitch volunteered. Only the young ever volunteer for black-ops missions. All around me the woods are filled with gun fire and the screams of the dying.

[Chapter 2 by Elisabeth Ford](#)[See more of Story Wars](#)

To be fair, none of them knew about the machine until they were in the woods.

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...they didn't learn about anything of course - it's

not like any of us has time to debate the ethics of the situation but I suppose I should share some of the responsibility for my comrades' deaths; I am technically their commanding officer.

Our adversary, the weapon, is what's called a multi-agent system; a hybrid intelligence of several scruffy-logic compartments each composed of an ultra-strong semi-rigid nano-film designed to take virtually any shape the machine decides. Its brain, spread equally amongst the symbiotic units is modeled to be as robust as possible and, of course, to adapt and evolve over time. Each one of us it kills, it grows a little smarter. We told them all this in the briefing and explained that, having been set free, the weapon was no longer under our control. It is loose on the island, we are the only soldiers here and the only way to stop it is to take it down.

Naturally this isn't true; there's always a kill switch. The only question is: in whose hand?

Chapter 3 by LeWeasel



I stumble for just a moment, instinctively stopping as the back of Sassenick's head explodes and blood bursts everywhere. As I slow, I'm run into by another young soldier. He barrels over me, running as fast as he can to get away from the machine. His gun is thrown over his back, his clothes wet and muddy and covered in blood and bits of his comrades.

"Hamilton!" I yell, picking my pace back up, running close to the ground to avoid the machine's aim as I catch up with the young man.

The machine has thrown my men into too much disarray for us to have any chance at stopping it. Now my only hope is the kill switch, and finding out who holds it. Hamilton, back on base, at least, was a bright and optimistic man, who always had a big, crooked grin and a joke to crack. Everyone knew Hamilton. They came to him for all their problems- from girls to depression, and he would be the best man to know who could potentially have the thing that would save us all.

He ducks behind a rock outcrop, breathing hard, his eyes wide and his face white. I slide next to him, grateful for the moment of cover. While it will protect us from the physical harm of the machine, there's still the screams of my men and the stench of fear and death in the air.

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He fires, and the machine's attention is immediately on him. I don't see the bullet hit the machine, but I sure as hell do see the machine's attack take the man's head off.

"Sir, I'm really sorry." Hamilton says, holding his knees tight to his chest and gasping for breath.

I duck back to safety and look Hamilton right in the eye. "Listen, Hamilton." I say harshly. "I don't care what you're sorry for. I need you to think. Who could have the kill switch?"

He looks at me blankly. "The what?"

"The kill switch. For the machine. It has to have one."

He shrugs, looking down. His face is still dead white, contrasting starkly to the black mud and the red blood on his skin.

Chapter 4 by Tricia L



He mused, chewing the inside of his cheek slightly as he considered the possibilities.

"Someone important would have it, if it exists. But if it does, then why haven't they used it?"

It hits me like a freight train. "It's not gone rogue. It's a test."

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